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HXXXXXXX, April 10, 2024

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Am Steinfels 1

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[Translated from German]

Background on the Prohibition of Blood – Your Reply of March 7, 2024

Dear Brothers,

First of all, thank you very much for your letter AK:SSM of March 7, 2024. In it, you state that it is not possible for you to address and answer every single point raised. Of course, I understand that, and I did not expect that. Rather, on the one hand, my intention was that these thoughts be brought to your attention and be given serious consideration, which you have kindly assured me of. On the other hand, I was seeking assistance with the specific dilemma I am facing regarding my children.

However, you also wrote that your reply was carefully tailored to my questions and that I am encouraged to understand the principles involved and to draw the conclusions *myself*.

I have endeavored to do so. Unfortunately, your letter was so general in nature that none of my specific lines of reasoning were addressed. While your reply once again explains in detail how the current understanding of our beliefs is supported, it does not deal with the contradictions I have pointed out.

Yet how could I attain inner peace when I am faced with choosing between principles that appear to be in conflict, each carrying extremely serious consequences?

<u>On the one hand, I am instructed to</u> show mercy in the application of God's laws, to act with humanity in situations of distress, to do all things on the basis of my own faith, not to put my trust in men, and not to call anyone my leader or set anyone as master over my faith and conscience except Christ (Matt. 12:7, 11, 12; Rom. 14:2; Ps. 146:3; Matt. 23:8; 2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Pet. 5:3).

<u>On the other hand,</u> there is the command to be obedient to those taking the lead. The current direction from the Governing Body requires that, when weighing the sanctity of life against the sanctity of blood in an emergency, I must give greater weight to *blood* than to life. This, however, seems to be in conflict with Jesus' teachings regarding mercy, as well as with my Bible-trained conscience and my faith. The consequence of not complying would be disfellowshipping and, ultimately, *"eternal damnation"* or *"everlasting death"* (Heb. 13:17; jv chap. 13 p. 184; g89 2/22 p. 27; w04 6/15 p. 20 par. 7).

<u>If I follow the one principle, I sin against my conscience and my family, and thus against God. If I follow the other, I sin against the Governing Body and must expect disfellowshipping.</u>

This is the dilemma I am facing—and I am not alone in this.

When, in the first century, problems arose in the congregation that affected the physical well-being of the flock, *"a murmuring arose."* Yet this was evidently not viewed as a sign of disrespect (Acts 6:1). In response, the widows concerned were not given a lesson in simply trusting the lead and not *"pushing ahead,"* but rather the matter was handled with humility, and prompt relief was provided. This, too, was part of what it meant to remain *"in the teaching of the Christ"* (2 John 9; Acts 6:2, 3; 1 Tim. 5:8).

Today, however, the decision of a Christian who, in an emergency, chooses in behalf of the welfare of his family to regard his life as more sacred than the symbol of blood is viewed as *"an evidence of gross disrespect"* and is, as a consequence, met with disfellowshipping. Such a person, despite his faith and loyalty, is ultimately treated in much the same way as an apostate (jv chap. 13 p. 184; 1 Tim. 5:8; Rom. 9:3). This is an untenable situation, and in view of such a profound impact on personal well-being, specific guidance in this matter is surely warranted.

Far be it from me to distance myself from the association of Jehovah's Witnesses by means of a conscientious decision. I would not have written my letter if it were not my earnest desire to show respect for the teachings provided by the Governing Body. Throughout my life, I have devoted my strength to the service of Jehovah, the congregation, and my family—often beyond my personal limits. **Yet you can no doubt appreciate the severe test I am under when, in the matter of blood, I must choose between my Bible-trained conscience on the one hand and obedience to the Governing Body on the other.**

How, then, might this situation be resolved? Fundamentally, we should always endeavor to view matters from the standpoint of a loving father (Eph. 5:17). **As long as there is room for a conscientious decision and for the exercise of mercy, disfellowshipping should not be a possibility** (Matt. 12:7). Otherwise, we would be denying the faith in favor of men who may err in their interpretation of God's Word (w17 February, p. 26 par. 12). In matters of faith that involve life and death, the issue should be absolutely clear—something that, as I have set out in my first letter, is by no means the case (1 Cor. 4:6).

Clarification of this matter is a legitimate concern, especially since I was not of legal age at the time of my baptism. At that time, it was simply not possible for me to grasp fully the implications of potential future doubts and their consequences. In our publications, we unfortunately find many commendable examples of children being baptized as early as 10 or 12 years of age, even though the perfect Jesus was ready for this step only at about 30 years of age (w16 March p. 7 par. 19; w92 10/1 p. 22; Luke 3:21-23; Num. 4:3). Moreover, the Bible does not suggest the baptism of very young youths, so it can reasonably be concluded that when Paul listed reasons for disfellowshipping, he was hardly referring to children or to parents who, in the face of death, had to weigh blood against life (1 Cor. 5:11-13). In fact, he did not mention the subject of blood at all in that context.

This has been the experience of many young Jehovah's Witnesses over the years: They want to believe, they want to understand, and they want to remain within the congregation. Yet when they follow their conscience in weighing the sanctity of life against that of blood, they are expelled and treated as a *"wicked man"* (1 Cor. 5:9-13). This is also psychologically very difficult to bear, since the burden of guilt is placed entirely upon the individual.

On the one hand, the individual is not provided with a clear answer to his existential questions; on the other hand, measures are enforced that reach deeply into his personal rights and can have devastating consequences for his life. This, I believe, is not responsible.

The organization has a duty of care to provide clear instruction regarding the Scriptural understanding of blood—especially toward minors.

At present, our literature presents what appears to be a clear, finished, and closed interpretation of the prohibition on blood, without addressing the complexities that do, in fact, exist. Nor are individuals given the necessary information to form a well-founded conscientious decision. Most believers are not even aware of the difficulties underlying the current teaching. All the sources that allow for a deeper understanding of the first-century prohibition on blood I have had to acquire myself through demanding Bible scholarship.

The inconsistencies in our literature, to which I have drawn attention in a spirit of faith, should—out of respect for God's Word and for the well-being of the individual—at least be presented transparently. And wherever even the slightest uncertainty exists, the decision should be left to the conscience of the individual. Such an approach is in harmony with the high value that human life has in God's eyes.

At present, our literature often appeals to our trust and patience, assuring us that necessary adjustments will be made in due time and that we should not push ahead. However, the current handling of the matter has remained largely unchanged since 1961. In the case of blood, waiting patiently for adjustments could, under certain circumstances, already amount to a disregard for the sanctity of life—even if done in faithful trust. Moreover, the individual is still being compelled to act against his conscience. Yet *"indeed, everything that is not out of faith is sin."* (Rom. 14:23).

I cannot wait until a medical emergency arises within my family, for at that point I must already be able to rely on a conscientious decision based on faith. Otherwise, I risk religious separation from my family and the loss of my entire social environment, which—according to the recommendations found in our literature—consists exclusively of Jehovah's Witnesses. This would also have serious consequences for my children. And I find myself asking whether, under such circumstances, I should teach them the same beliefs with which I was raised.

Because of the limited assistance provided in response to my letter, I must admit that for the first time in my life, I feel the painful sense of not receiving *"food at the proper time"* from the faithful slave. The issue of blood affects servants of Jehovah around the world every day—often in situations of extreme physical and emotional distress. **Therefore, the matter of disfellowshipping as a result of a conscientious decision regarding the use of blood in emergencies should be given the highest priority,** whereas adjustments regarding beards, trousers, and ties, though appropriate, are far less urgent. Please forgive me for speaking so plainly, but this concerns my own life and that of my family.

I simply cannot believe that it would be more pleasing to God for me to allow my child to die than to provide a life-saving treatment. That would imply that the symbol of blood is more important to Him than the life of my child. Yet Jesus clearly showed the absurdity of such a view when he spoke of a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:11, 12). He expressed it unmistakably: *"However, if you had understood what this means, 'I want mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless ones."* And: *"How much more worth is a man than a sheep!"* (Matt. 12:7, 12).

As matters stand, in addition to the continuing deep uncertainty, I am left with the feeling that, in a critical situation, I would be left alone with my greatest struggles—despite my sincere efforts to bring my faith into harmony with the direction provided by the Governing Body.

If we compel faithful Christians to act against their conscience, we sin against God. I am also convinced that this course will, at some point, bring us into conflict with the secular authorities (Rom. 13:1; Phil. 1:7; 4:5). If that should occur, it would not be due to God's will, but because we have extended the grounds for disfellowshipping in a way that goes beyond what is written. Of this we should be mindful.

What I long for and pray for instead are harmony, understanding, mercy, and love (1 Cor. 13:2).

Yours sincerely,

Your brother

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